



FAA Intercom

Flight Plan: Agency Faced Hurdles in April

There was some mixed news in the monthly update of the FAA's Flight Plan performance. Overall, the agency achieved 27 of its 30 goals in April.

The good news is that although the general aviation accident rate was one of three elements that received a failing "red" status, it appears to have stabilized with a trend line that might actually get the agency into the successful "green" zone.

On the capacity front, the news is less positive. Severe weather and scheduling congestion at Chicago O'Hare International Airport created a potent recipe for delays and the FAA's goal for on-time arrivals reflects this. In fact, it's certain the FAA will not hit green this year in this measure.

It should be noted that because the Flight Plan is dynamic, management will be reviewing this specific target next year and may modify it to reflect factors that the agency controls directly. For example, could the FAA factor out weather to get a more accurate picture of how the National Airspace System performs?

The third element to receive a red status was Flight Plan funding. The performance target is to fund 75 percent of the programs and initiatives that were not funded through the normal appropriations process. There was a spirited discussion

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Employees Lay Foundation for TRACON



Regional Administrator Amy Corbett cuts the ribbon at the dedication of the new Boston Consolidated TRACON. Flanking her are Tom Brantley, PASS national president, (left) and Bruce Johnson, vice president for Terminal Services.

The new Boston Consolidated Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facility will be serving airlines and their passengers, the military and general aviation in the New England region for decades to come. It also will serve as an example of how to build the best state-of-the-art facility in the FAA.

Hundreds of current and former FAA employees, government officials and industry representatives got the chance to view the new facility at its dedication ceremony on May 14 in Merrimack, N.H. What they saw in terms of exterior and

execution was a facility that has taken the agency to a new level.

With antecedents in the recently built Potomac, Southern California and Atlanta TRACONs, Boston Consolidated TRACON planners got a strong head start by analyzing the lessons learned when those projects were constructed.

But what truly provided the strong foundation of the new TRACON is the input of the employees who work there. The resolve to involve the employees in the decision-making process

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Read about the new TSP investment fund, controller hiring, the latest on the ATO, and the Flight Standards reorganization.



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Page 4. Honoring Orville and Wilbur.



Page 5. Fifty years of federal service.



Page 6. Focused on safety for 45 years.



News in Brief

Wire into Wireless Information

Passengers who want to check on airport delays now have a new option to access that information.

The FAA has developed a system in which individuals can use wireless devices with Internet access to find out about the status of delays at airports and other key travel information.

Wireless users with Internet access can punch in www.faa.gov/wireless to find updates.

The FAA has increased its efforts to keep passengers informed about delays in an effort to improve efficiency in the air traffic system — one of its primary Flight Plan goals. The feeling is that informing passengers ahead of time about possible problems would enable them to make decisions and travel changes that would reduce congestion at airports and through airport security.

This is the third option devised by the agency to help passengers keep in the know. Travelers can find airport information on their computers by accessing www.fly.faa.gov.

They also can receive automatic updates on airport delays via the Internet on their home computers or hand-held Internet devices by registering at www.fly.faa.gov/Products/AIS/ais.html.



CMD to Come under FAA Academy

The FAA's Center for Management Development (CMD) in Palm Coast, Fla., will come under the direction of the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City in September.

The move will join the agency's two main training centers, saving money in the process. The facilities had been operating independently of each other.

The merger is part of the organizational excellence goal in the FAA Flight Plan. Administrator Marion Blakey said the move "will provide significant cost savings by allowing us to optimize the use of our facilities, avoid program redundancy and duplication, and allow greater flexibility in the use of instructors, training facilities and systems, and support contractors."

Blakey said employees working at CMD and the academy would remain at their current locations.

From Sun-N-Fun to Oshkosh

Sabrina Levcsik from the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Automated Flight Service Station (AFSS) was chosen specialist of the year for her work at the Sun-N-Fun fly-in in Lakeland, Fla.

Levcsik is the latest individual selected to represent the Southern Region at the EAA Convention in Oshkosh, Wisc.

Great Lakes Region does the

same, choosing one of its specialists at Oshkosh to represent the region at Sun-N-Fun. Representing Great Lakes at this year's Sun-N-Fun was George Tuominen from the Kankakee (Ill.) AFSS.

The runner-up to Levcsik was Eric Albrecht from the Gainesville AFSS.

The FAA provides strong support to both of these air shows, setting up temporary flight service stations (TFSSs) to provide weather and other vital information to general aviation pilots flying into and out of the shows.

New Center of Excellence to Focus on Cabin Safety

The FAA is soliciting offers from university and industry leaders to help establish the agency's new center of excellence for airliner cabin environment.

Over the next decade, the center of excellence will cover the full spectrum of airliner cabin environment research. It will conduct basic research and engineering development, prototyping and testing of new technologies that will enhance the safety of aircraft cabins.

The solicitation will be open through July 9, with a winning team selected early in August. The FAA will share in the center's cost, providing at least \$2 million over the first three years.

An earlier public meeting held by the FAA's Centers of Excellence Program Office and Civil Aerospace Medical Office to discuss the center drew 60 university and industry leaders.



Reggie Rivers, manager of the Lakeland TFSS, presents the Sun-N-Fun specialist of the year award to Levcsik. Runner-up Eric Albrecht is at right.



FAA Held Accountable

The FAA's continuing efforts to achieve financial accountability received a big boost when it received a prestigious award from the Association of Government Accountants.



The AGA's "Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting" is the highest form of recognition in federal government management reporting. The certificate recognizes how the FAA reports its successes and failures, its ability to document its benefits to the public, and how it uses these reports to make improvements.

Last year, only seven agencies in the entire federal government received the certificate of excellence.

AGA is a nationwide, 15,000-member organization made up of individuals working in financial management at federal, state and local governments.

Flight Safety Seeks Nominations

The Flight Safety Foundation is soliciting nominations for two of its annual awards.

Nominations are requested for the Honeywell Bendix Trophy, which is given to individuals or institutions that contribute to aviation safety through improved equipment or equipment usage. It also recognizes innovation in advanced safety equipment. The deadline for nominations is June 25.

The Airport Safety Award is given for outstanding improvement in ramp safety through innovation and implementation of

new methods, practices or policies. The deadline for nominations is July 9.

Copies of the nomination forms can be accessed at www.flightsafety.com. Click on "Awards" at the top of the home page. Then click on the appropriate award in the left hand column. From there, scroll down to the link for nomination forms. Note: The Airport Award in the left hand column comes under "Ramp Safety."

Nominations can be e-mailed directly from the Web site or faxed to (703) 739-6708.

FAA Credit Union Expands Nationwide

FAA First Federal Credit Union is now offering service to employees around the country.

The 55-year-old credit union has had a presence in the Western Pacific, Northwest Mountain, Alaskan and Great Lakes regions for years.



Since its inception in 1949, FAA First has focused on serving the unique needs of FAA employees — many of whom travel regularly or maintain shift schedules, not conducive to traditional banking hours. The credit union has continuously enhanced its electronic access and remote service delivery systems, rather than relying primarily on branch offices to provide service.

Financial services include early access to FAA and government payroll funds, online banking with electronic statements and bill payment, and online mortgage and consumer loan approval.

FAA First also offers investment and financial planning services, and a Platinum Visa Credit Card with an airline mileage program.

For more information, call (800) 421-7111, or visit www.faafirst.org.

Weather System Now Eligible for AIP Funding

The FAA's Airport Improvement Program (AIP) office said that airports may now request AIP funds to pay for the Weather Support to Deicing Decision Making System.

The system is made up of snow gauges, weather radar, and surface weather instruments that help airline and airport personnel make aircraft deicing and runway plowing decisions. The system contributes to increased safety and efficiency for air carriers and airport managers.

The availability of AIP funds will make the system more marketable to airports that have expressed an interest in the system, but have a limited operating budget. The system has been used at Denver International Airport and the three major New York airports.

Oakland Center Lands ATOP

The new Advanced Technologies and Oceanic Procedures (ATOP) system has been installed at the Oakland en route and oceanic center after successful testing.

The ATOP system replaces existing systems and procedures responsible for separation of aircraft over the oceans, enabling controllers to reduce spacing between aircraft while preserving passenger safety and improving routing efficiency. ATOP will increase capacity for international air travel and automate the manual processes used today.



ATO's Initial Impact Expected in Two Years

Initial operating results from the new Air Traffic Organization should be apparent within 2 ½ years, Chief Operating Officer Russ Chew told his employees in a nationwide teleconference last month.

In a brief presentation and in answering questions from the audience, Chew discussed his expectations for the future, the current status of the reorganization, and what role the Operations Planning Services line of business will play in the ATO. Steve Brown, vice president of the unit, spoke as well, announcing a restructuring of his organization (see box below).

Chew made it clear that the change in culture will take years. While

acknowledging ATO employees are working during a "confusing time," and sympathizing with their discomfort during the transition, Chew maintained that the ATO was headed in the right direction.

He said that employees could expect some sense of stability by the end of the fiscal year when work responsibilities should become clearer. He expects employees' behavioral norms to change in the next 3-5 years, with cultural change also occurring over that period. Within a decade, employees should be comfortable working within the new organization.

Chew also envisions an ATO that will continue to change with the times. Workforce planning, the 5-year Flight Plan, and efforts by the Joint Program and Development Office are just a few of the issues that will force the ATO to adapt.

"That's a tough job," Chew said. But if FAA employees are anything like those he has worked with in the past, "I'm not worried," he said.

During the question-and-answer period, Chew noted the FAA has an "extraordinary percentage of contractors" compared to other organizations for which he has worked. But whether the FAA will continue to use contractors at the same rate or turn to full-time employees remains an open question, he said. The decision regarding contractors will be dictated by budget, not by management.

"There are places where [using] contractors make sense and where [using full-time employees] do," he added. "We'll put guidelines out on that."

Responding to another question, Chew said that budget numbers and cost/benefit ratios would help the ATO prioritize its projects. He said two training sessions regarding budgeting and cost management are in the works.

Orville and Wilbur Find a Home in Washington

The Wright Brothers have a permanent place in the history, memory and imagination of Americans. Now they have something more concrete in the nation's capital.

President Bush signed into law legislation that officially names the two Headquarters buildings in Washington, D.C., after Orville and Wilbur Wright.

"This is a fitting tribute for two American icons," said Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta. "Aviation began with the Wright Brothers' dream of flight. Today, the Department of Transportation helps continue that dream as millions of travelers fly safely to locations throughout the world."



Orville Wright



Wilbur Wright

The idea for the renaming of the Headquarters buildings came from within the FAA. Federal Building 10-A at 800 Independence Ave. will be named the Orville Wright Federal Building. The newly renovated 10-B building across the street — which is due to be officially opened shortly — will be named after Wilbur Wright. Scale replicas of the Wright Flyer and the Wright Glider will hang permanently in the building lobbies.

"It's a wonderful way to cap our national yearlong celebration of the Wright Brothers achievement," said Administrator Marion C. Blakey. "As FAA Administrator it is good to see the FAA get recognition it so richly deserves."

Ops Planning to Influence ATO

Employees from Operations Planning will play an important part in the ATO, working "very closely with line operating businesses, almost as if you're in their department" Chew said. Employees in Operations Planning will have more influence in their line of business, and their organization will have a lot of influence over the ATO. "This is the appropriate organization to lead the ATO strategically," Chew said.

Steve Brown introduced a new organizational structure he called "The Next Level Down." Currently under review by the Office of Human Resources, the structure is the result of a study that showed how work flows through Operations Planning and how it can be done more efficiently.

The new organizational structure for Operations Planning and other ATO organizations is available at www.ato.faa.gov (click on "Document Library" and "ATO Org Chart - Next Level Down").



New Approaches — Not Budget — Will Drive Controller Hiring

It often makes for interesting theater when the FAA administrator appears before members of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, and last month's meeting was no exception.

Administrator Marion Blakey took little time in addressing the issue that was on the minds of many attendees — controller staffing levels.

Since Congress did not approve funding for new controllers in fiscal year 2004, and with aviation trust fund dollars shrinking, Blakey said the agency is trying to find new approaches with current resources to increase the number of candidates in the controller pipeline before the expected wave of retirements hit.

The approach that drew the greatest consternation among attendees

was to have controller candidates pay for their initial training at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City, Okla. "Law firms don't hire attorneys and pay them to go through law school," Blakey said. "These are lean budget times for us and that's a place we might be able to make a difference."

The FAA is reconsidering its rule that forces controllers to retire at 56 years of age, suggesting in its stead one that would allow controllers to apply for a waiver to keep working beyond that age.

It's also looking for cost-effective ways of moving controllers from overstaffed to understaffed facilities. Complicating the agency's staffing efforts are changes in traveling trends in which low-cost carriers operating out of medium-sized airports are growing, while the FAA

predicts that legacy carriers such as American and United will carry a smaller percentage of passengers each year.

In a year in which politics will dominate, Blakey mentioned the upcoming presidential election.

"I know we may have different ideas about the desired outcome, but regardless of the outcome, less will change than some think," she told the audience. "The on-going givens are a tight fiscal climate and paying the bill for Iraq, terrorism, security. Election or no, the budget challenge is going to stay with us."

Blakey also said she expects to serve out her full 5-year term whatever the election's outcome.

FAAer is the Star on Her Golden Anniversary

Like many people, Patty Clark has worked a number of jobs in her life. There was the position with the Navy back in 1954. She also worked at an electronics company in her hometown of Nashua, N.H., for a couple of years.

Then on March 31, 1963, the FAA's Boston Center opened and the very next day, Clark started working there. Forty-one years later, she is still there and proud of it.

Clark's 41 years at the FAA, and her 50 years in government service, make her somewhat of a celebrity in Nashua. The Boston Center hosted a party for her on the 50th anniversary of her joining the federal government. An article about her appeared in Manchester's *Union Leader*; Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta sent her a letter; and her name was scheduled to be read into the Congressional record.

What has kept her coming back all these years?

"I love dealing with the people because everyone gets along and the controllers are very helpful," said Clark, who is secretary to the center manager.

Clark deals with many issues in her position. But it's unclear whether her job description includes dealing with some of the odder calls she's received.

One woman called to report that a low flying aircraft had upset her cows to the point where they wouldn't give milk.

Then there was the gentleman



Patty Clark

who claimed that strange objects were following his car. He asked Clark if he could come to the facility to see if the center could track the objects by radar.

Besides answering strange phone calls, Clark helps with pay roll issues, incoming/outgoing mail, and assists with the travel arrangements for employees in her department. Her dedication to her job is as impressive as her longevity.

Terry Biggio, the center manager, said Clark "never takes annual leave or sick days. Even when she did have a serious arm injury she kept on going and it never seemed to slow her down."

During her off hours, Clark spends her weekends with her family. But come Monday morning, you know Patty Clark will be sitting pretty and happily at the Boston Center.

Lesley Pobereznny contributed this story to the FAA Intercom.



45 Years of Teaching Aviation Safety

With 45 years of FAA experience under his belt, and already enshrined in the Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame, it's hard to imagine what a guy like John Blohm has to look forward to when he comes to work in the morning.

Blohm, an 83-year-old safety program manager in the Springfield (Ill.) Flight Standards District Office (FSDO), was asked about his longevity and motivation last month as he was resting up from prostate surgery at his home. "I just have a positive attitude," he said. "I take care of myself. I enjoy my job. That helps, too, I guess."

His coworkers agree. "John loves flying," said Carol Prosperini, an administrative officer at the FSDO. "I have learned [from John] that you can choose a career and truly love what you are doing."

David Slaybaugh, an aviation safety inspector at the facility, said Blohm called him at work while he was out on medical leave, wanting to know what was going on. "He missed the job and the people at the office," Slaybaugh said.

Blohm began his FAA career in March 1959 as an aviation safety inspector at the general district office in San Antonio, Texas. Since then, he has worked in several regions and held a variety of positions. His career is studded with superior achievement awards, letters of commendation and a distinguished service award presented to him by then-FAA Administrator Jane Garvey in 2002.



Among the many pilots attending Blohm's sessions is Apollo 13 astronaut, Capt. James Lovell (left).

The awards didn't come up in conversation with the self-effacing Blohm, but the rewards of education became a theme.

Blohm said the biggest change in the agency's approach to safety was moving away from the "violate, violate, violate" enforcement school of safety, and moving strongly into educating and training pilots better. Simply suspending an airman's certificate for a month or two didn't address the pilot's deficiencies, and often just made them mad, he recalled. Now, with remedial training the norm, pilots can learn from their mistakes, regain their certificates and have their records expunged in two years.

"My philosophy is safety through education," Blohm said. "It leads to fewer accidents."

Blohm has spent the last couple of years setting up training sessions and working with the FAA Wings Program, which arranges for volunteer flight

inspectors to provide free 3-hour training to pilots. He has personally instructed thousands of pilots over the years and gained a place in the lore of Illinois aviators.

"[John's] associates volunteer to support his safety programs and they frequently travel great distances to participate," said Dixie Norton, the Springfield FSDO manager.

"John's programs are some of the most popular safety programs in the country," said Jim Balazs, principal avionics inspector at the FSDO. "Nearly everyone involved with aviation in the state knows John Blohm and most of them have attended his program meetings."

That includes Capt. James Lovell, the astronaut who commanded Apollo 13. Lovell attends Blohm's programs to maintain his proficiency. "[Lovell's presence] kind of impresses all the participants" at the sessions, Blohm said. "It means a lot to me."

"He's fantastic," said Lovell. "[John's] a real asset to the FAA. Personally, he's a nice guy to talk to. [He's] full of a lot of information that we as pilots should absorb."

What greater highlight could Blohm expect than praise from a legendary astronaut or being one of the few aviation safety inspectors inducted into the Illinois Aviation Hall of Fame? What more could he ask?

Blohm said he'd like people to know he's given a 100 percent everyday at work. He added, "I think if I may have saved a few lives, then my mission has been well accomplished."



Flight Standards Reorganization Based on System Safety Model

Flight Standards is proposing some big changes to its safety program this year.

The objective is to streamline the reporting process by designating a regional program manager in each region to which all of the local field safety program managers would report. Flight Standards is taking a more national approach to its safety goals and this reorganization is expected to help it prioritize broader goals over those of local concern.

The next steps in the reorganization are to coordinate with the union and gain approval from Human Resources for new position descriptions for safety program managers. The new position will be titled "system safety program manager."

Planning for the reorganization has been in process for the last two years. Jim Ballough, Flight Standards director, announced approval of the plan at the National Safety Program Managers Conference held in Las Vegas in March.

The reorganization is based on the system safety model, working with operators and individual pilots.

Also, new safety program districts will be created, although they may not correspond with current Flight Standards districts. The districts will be based on pilot demographics, geographic considerations, weather similarities, and topographic anomalies.

The resulting reorganization may lead to the loss of some positions. Flight Standards safety program managers would have to bid anew for their positions, which would carry higher grades. Managers who do not win the bids would return to their duties as aviation safety inspectors.

The Great Lakes and Northwest Mountain Regions have volunteered to test the reorganization for a year to make sure it delivers the expected safety benefits and would not cost more than the current organization does.



Representing more than 150 years of combined aviation experience are (from left) Rudy Tomasik and Tom Sarkes, who received Charles Taylor Master Mechanic Awards, and Herb Barnes, Wright Brothers Master Pilot awardee.

Other Safety News

The Windsor Locks FSDO in Connecticut held its annual SafetyFest/MaintenanceFest as a kickoff for National Transportation Week. More than 800 people attended the 2-day event, which provided pilots, flight instructors, mechanics and technicians a wide-ranging variety of safety information.

FSDO and industry presenters offered more than 25 seminars and workshops. Other FAA presenters included employees from the Bradley Tower, Bridgeport AFSS, New England Region

Aviation Education Program, and New England Region Runway Safety Program.

The event culminated with an awards ceremony recognizing the Windsor Locks FSDO flight instructor, maintenance technician, avionics technician and aviation safety counselor of the year. Additionally, two Charles Taylor "Master Mechanic" awards (recognizing 50 years or more as an aviation mechanic) and one Wright Brothers "Master Pilot" award (recognizing 50 years or more as a pilot) were awarded.

GA Accident Rate Stabilizing *continued from page 1*

around cost savings versus cost avoidance.

Regarding organizational excellence, Ramesh Punwani, the new chief financial officer, said he is "cautiously optimistic" that the FAA can resolve problems with DELPHI and PRISM. The worst-case scenario is that the FAA will

not achieve a clean audit for the year and fall into the red category in the president's management agenda.

To review complete results for April, access the FAA's Internet Web site and click on "FAA's Flight Plan 2004-2008 How are we performing?"



Flight Plan: International Leadership

Tiny Islands Enjoy Big Friendship

The FAA helps prove that the world's most powerful country doesn't turn a blind eye to its smallest friends when they need a hand.

A case in point is the executive resource staff in the Western-Pacific Region, which quietly manages one of the FAA's many successful international programs. Since 1986, long before international leadership became a priority in the FAA's performance plan, the region's international specialists have coordinated technical assistance to Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, three tiny island nations in the central Pacific Ocean.

An agreement signed by the United States provides for a special relationship with the Micronesia governments, which are strategically important to the United States and to which U.S. carriers and passengers travel every day, said Barry Brayer, manager of the executive resource staff.

Recently, specialists from the Hawaii-Pacific Sector Management Office in Honolulu and the Guam System Support Center completed the first phase of an

upgrade to electronic and visual navigational aids at six airports throughout Micronesia. These improvements included new engine generators, precision approach lighting systems and new underground power cables.

Under a memorandum of agreement with the State of Hawaii, the FAA also provides airport rescue and firefighter training to the countries.

The Western-Pacific Region assisted in a 5-day training class focusing on establishing an emergency operations center and incident command system for airport rescue and firefighting and other employees in Kosrae, Micronesia. The training culminated with a live emergency exercise.

Western-Pacific helps the three countries draft civil aviation regulations and develop instrument approach procedures, and consults on airfield pavement improvements. It also hosts an annual workshop for the ministers of civil aviation, airport managers, air carriers and others with a stake in Pacific-area aviation. This year's workshop, held in Saipan, drew more than 150 aviation representatives.

Other International News

More than 150 people from around the world attended the 2004 FAA Worldwide Airport Technology Transfer Conference and Exposition.

Attendees heard about the successes of the FAA's airport technology researchers that are improving airport safety and efficiency. The agency's research is a comprehensive approach that covers such issues as airport pavement design, modeling and testing, airport planning, rescue and firefighting, wildlife mitigation, visual guidance and runway incursion reduction, as well as runway surface technology.

Satish Agrawal, manager of the FAA's airport technology research program, said that by working with other government agencies, industry, and academia, "we are leveraging resources to ensure our work remains targeted on high priority activities that will benefit the flying public."

David L. Bennett, director of the Office of Airport Safety and Standards, noted that research and development is critical to updating more than 100 advisory circulars on airport standards and development.

Anne Harlan, director of the FAA's William J. Hughes Technical Center, said the conferences provide a forum for the aviation community to work together on aviation safety.

Palau airport fire fighters learn how to use their gear. The FAA supports these sessions.





New Boston TRACON Sets Example for Future Projects

continued from the front page

from the earliest days sealed the design's success as surely as mortar sealed its structure.

Jim Chin, an electronics engineer in the implementation center, said the project featured "the most coordination" of any project he's been involved with in the past 10 years. "Everybody had the common goal," he said.

The bottom line for Andy Hale, a 17-year controller from the old Boston TRACON, is that union/management cooperation "made this place come together the way it did."

What came together is a place that is almost entirely automated. From the chiller plant and environmental control system to the critical redundant power distribution system, the goal was to meet the rigid design specifications of the FAA, provide a system that is considered environmentally friendly, and to allow for a significant reduction in energy consumption.

The TRACON has the FAA's newest power distribution system, which gives the facility the ability to monitor and analyze trends in power consumption and automatically adapt if a power loss or equipment failure occurs, minimizing the impact on air traffic services.

The TRACON's state-of-the-art technology runs the full range of the alphabet: ACE IDS, ETMS, BWIM, RDVS and the largest number of STARS consoles of any FAA facility.

Employees faced a mighty job in rigging up systems that would allow the Boston Consolidated TRACON to receive feeds from remote navigational aids and 11 towers.

The operations room could have been designed for a futuristic sci-fi movie. Nineteen radar screens emit a cool, soothing blue light. The murmuring of controllers, muted by the acoustical tiles, and the subdued overhead lighting lends



The TRACON's lunchroom features a multi-story window looking out on woods.

the ops room an air of composure. It's hard to imagine a crisis upsetting the calmness in the room; it's equally hard to imagine a better place to handle a crisis should one occur.

The outside hallway surrounding the ops room is designed with maintenance in mind. The wide corridors allow for easy carting of equipment and access to consoles. The back wall of the ops room can be dismantled to add more radarscopes if necessary. Utilities have been designed to accommodate a major expansion of the facility.

The agency's commitment to the project didn't escape the notice of employees. "I'm just glad the FAA spent the money to bring us into the new millennium," said Mike Yanis, an environmental specialist in Technical Operations.

Cooperation with employees was essential because the consolidated

TRACON is the biggest project in the New England region since the Boston Center was built in 1963.

The employees moving there came from TRACONS with very different work environments. The Manchester TRACON was a medium-volume facility that handled primarily general aviation traffic. The antiquated Boston TRACON was responsible for some of the more complex airspace found in the northeastern United States and handled primarily commercial airline traffic.

The Boston TRACON planning team wondered how to blend the talents of employees from the Terminal and Technical Operations Services units while adapting to their different work environments and keeping potential friction to a minimum.

By forming teams with individuals from the two old facilities to focus on design elements, planners were able to glean the best aspects of both environments while fostering a camaraderie that transferred to the new TRACON along with the employees.

The success of the project brought a sense of pride and accomplishment to the employees. "We have the experience, the expertise, the talent," said Jack Emberg of his engineering coworkers who worked on the planning team. "Now we can prove it."

"I take pride in ownership," said Yanis. "I consider it my building."

How'd It Go?

So what's involved in a major consolidation like the Boston TRACON and how do employees deal with it? See pages 10-11 for personal perspectives on the project.



Boston Consolidated TRACON's Success

If you build it they will come. If you let them help in the building, they will come happily and with a sense of ownership and camaraderie.

That was the case for the Boston Consolidated Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facility in Merrimack, N.H., a project that posed emotional complications as well as technological ones. The combination of two TRACONs with very different work environments could have been disruptive and might have even affected service to the FAA's customers.

Instead, the cutover of communications from the old facilities to the consolidated TRACON went without a hitch. That's because of all the effort that went into the planning of the new facility and because of the buy-in from employees who would be working there.

That involvement started at square one. Before he even had a chance to touch the new equipment, Mike Yanis was invited to watch the building wired and the equipment installed. Yanis, an environmental specialist in the Technical Operations Services Unit, called it an "invaluable experience" to see how things were done from the start.

Yanis, who has been tasked with



(From left) Jim Chin, Bob Aitken and Jack Emberg were members of the ANI team that lead the project.

maintaining the facility's environmental system after eight years of being a jack-of-all-trades at the Boston TRACON, also appreciated the opportunity to focus on one system. "I never had a chance to be an expert on one thing," he said. "Now I can focus and become a resident expert on a system."

The opposite was true for Yanis' coworker, Mike Davis, who had become the resident expert on radar maintenance at the Manchester TRACON. Suddenly, he was assigned to the communication, automation and surveillance unit and asked to be the point of contact for the bandwidth manager project. "It's a little unnerving," he admitted, but he feels he's in a "much better position now" for opportunities down the line.

Andy Hale, a 17-year veteran controller from the old Boston TRACON, had a similar reaction when realizing the caliber of the new equipment available for the project. The Boston and Manchester TRACONs used ARTS and other mid-age equipment. "Everything in this facility is new," said Hale. "There's not a person who had experience with any of this equipment," he said. The fact that the communications cutover from the old TRACONs to the new one was "seamless to the user" speaks well for the planning involved. As team lead for the information display system, Hale said he and the leads for other project teams "were given full

decision-making authority. This whole project from the planning stages to the implementation went very well as a result of the total team effort," Hale said.

For many Manchester and Boston controllers, the consolidation "was kind of a like a homecoming," said Rodney Wilcox, a Manchester controller. They had communicated regularly with each other for years from different locations. Now they would be in one place.

But that consolidation raised some sensitivity, as well.

Locating the consolidated TRACON in New Hampshire meant some disruption for Boston TRACON employees, many of whom had to move.

On the other hand, the Merrimack facility was practically in Manchester's backyard. Wilcox said he and his Manchester TRACON coworkers were sensitive to that fact. "We decided to act like guests in their house" to help ease the strain of relocation, Wilcox explained.

There was some concern among Manchester controllers that they would be "labeled second-class citizens" because Boston controllers worked at a high-volume facility that handled mostly commercial airline flights, while Manchester was a mid-volume TRACON that handled mostly general aviation.



Mike Davis (left) and Mike Yanis serve on the TRACON's Technical Operations staff.



was Designed from the Start

That never materialized. "The blending has come together very well," Wilcox said.

Hale agreed. "Our job has not changed," he said. Whether we're doing that at Logan or here, it doesn't matter. Once we came into the facility, [that concern] went by the wayside."

Bob Aitken, the project manager for ANI, thought the planning phase produced greater cohesion between him and his staff, and their NATCA union co-workers. Aitken said that many controllers didn't realize that ANI engineers are represented by NATCA. But that fact became more apparent as the engineers worked closely with controllers. Aitken said there were issues "that could have blown up without [our] being able to talk" openly. These discussions were instrumental in preventing the project from stagnating, added Jack Emberg, ANI's programs manager for terminal and weather systems.

Adjustments to the new operations room environment have been



Andy Hale (left) and Rodney Wilcox are controllers at the new TRACON.

necessary. The ops rooms at both Manchester and Boston were cramped affairs, but that closeness produced a supportive environment for controllers, according to Wilcox and Hale.

Hale thought controllers might have to work harder "at maintaining a team environment because of the size of the room."

Wilcox said the chain of command at the new TRACON is bigger and different than at Manchester. "You were not under the scrutiny you are here," he added. But the sheer success of the project and the good feelings produced by the team approach has overwhelmed most apprehensions.

"This level of collaboration is something I haven't seen in my 20-plus years of government service," said Hale. "A lot of people worked very hard and it shows."

Davis said his work on the bandwidth team made him "more intimate with the process. The group works better than any group that I've seen," he added.

Emberg sounds justly proud when discussing the tricky balancing act of attempting such a major upgrade without affecting operations. Bob Aitken's project management skills kept "everybody at ease and assured" and went a long way in making the consolidated TRACON a success, he said.

TSP to Offer New Investment Fund

The Thrift Savings Plan board has voted to offer a new investment opportunity for employees enrolled in its 401K plan.

The "L" lifecycle fund invests an employee's money according to when the employee will need to withdraw the money (normally at retirement). The fund uses target asset allocations that change over time as the set "time horizon" approaches. For employees who won't need to withdraw their investment for a long time, the fund will invest aggressively, mostly in stocks. As the retirement date for an employee nears, the fund automatically will invest the employee's money more conservatively, mostly in fixed-income investments.

The board will issue a request for

proposals from contractors who wish to administer the new fund. The L fund likely will not be available until next year.

The board moved to develop the L fund because of worrisome investment



THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

behavior that could significantly reduce the retirement income of TSP participants.

A large number of TSP participants invest most or all of their money in the G fund, the least risky of all the options, but also the fund with the lowest historical average return. Financial experts regularly encourage investors to

diversify their investments and to aggressively seek higher returns — even if there is more risk involved — if they are not near retirement age.

Although intended to expand employees' choices, the introduction of the small cap and international funds did little to increase

the diversification of many employees' portfolios.

Some employees have been investing their money based on what the market has done recently. Over time, this strategy often reduces investors' portfolios because they end up "buying high and selling low."



Controllers Chalk up a 'Major' Flight Assist

When Wanda Munoz from the administrator's office in the Central Region put out the call for nominations for the Kansas City Federal Executive Board's awards program, she got a little more than she bargained for.

One of the region's air traffic controllers happened to mention a flight assist he was involved with last January. The aircraft he helped land safely?

A \$2 billion B-2 Stealth bomber flown by the U.S. Air Force.

It was Jan. 28, a date Controller Eric Burwell remembers well because it is his birthday. Burwell, who works at the Kansas City Center, received a distress call from B-2 pilot Maj. Marc Miller, who reported that his plane had lost its computer processing system en route to Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri.

Burwell, working approach airspace to Whiteman, was quickly joined by coworkers Mark Bodine and Ed Townend. They immediately plugged in to assist Burwell with sector operation and coordination with the Whiteman AFB approach control.

Burwell instructed Miller, who flies for the 509th Operations Support Squadron, to make a right 360-degree turn, a maneuver designed to help the plane descend. Miller requested and was given a "no gyro" vector to Whiteman, which meant that he was flying with a "dark" cockpit and was being told by Burwell to turn in incremental degrees, calculated by timing.

As Burwell cleared Miller for visual approach to Whiteman, Townend instructed the approach control there to use a light gun to signal the B-2, and then coordinated a clearance to land. The B-2 soon landed safely in good condition.

Miller noted that the only instruments available to him were a small compass in an awkward location to view



Recognized for their role in the B-2 flight assist are (from left) Ed Townend, Mark Bodine and Eric W. Burwell. At right is Central Regional Administrator Chris Blum.

and an altitude indicator. The angle of the sun made it even more difficult for Miller to read the instruments. "If we'd had [bad] weather, it would have been very exciting," Miller said.

As a former Air Force controller, Miller said he understands all the coordination required in order to make things happen. He applauded the controllers for giving just the right amount of assistance, allowing the pilots to work the emergency.

"We had a handful of jet trying to get down," said Miller, who is trained to

handle the B-2 plane even when the flight mission control processor is lost. "They made our job a lot easier," he added.

The team effort earned Burwell, Bodine and Townend an award from the Kansas City Federal Executive Board. Chris Blum, Central Region administrator, told the audience at the ceremony that the controllers, along with the rest of the award winners, were "everyday heroes, who go about giving taxpayers their money's worth with a dedication seldom accompanied by fanfare."

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